

Underground papers surface, grow in numbers, influence

By The Associated Press

With less emphasis on bomb-making and more on day-to-day community problems, underground newspapers continue to grow in numbers and influence.

There are at least 400 of these "journals" published weekly compared to about 200 a few years ago. Underground editors say their total readership is about 20 million.

At the same time that underground papers have folded in major cities like New York and San Francisco, they are taking root in such unlikely turf as Apopka, Fla.; Anniston, Ala., and McConnellsburg, Pa.

"There isn't a town with a population of more than 50,000 that doesn't have an underground paper," says Max Scherr, founder and editor of the Berkeley Barb.

Changing focus

Since their major mushrooming in the late 60's, the papers have been changing to reflect the new moods of the youth movement. Where once the pages promoted urban guerrilla warfare, now they delve into local problems and issues of interest to a wide range of citizens.

"The underground press represented the vanguard of the revolutionary struggle," says Tom Forcade, a Zippie, Washington correspondent for the Underground Press Syndicate and self-styled authority on the underground scene.

"But what did all those kids living in hippie pads care about bombs? Now the papers are becoming much more relevant and realistic. They write about the alternative institutions of the community like day-care centers, the food co-ops, the health clinics."

Many underground papers have begun aiming at a broader audience, adding book

and movie reviews, activities, meetings and demonstrations that aren't covered as daily fare in traditional papers. "The tourists buy our paper to find out what's really happening in town," says Art Kunkin of the LA Free Press.

Boston After Dark began in 1966 to cover the arts and entertainment scene. "As we watched the changing attitudes in the country, we saw a responsibility to become more involved in socio-political issues—the antiwar movement, segregation, consumer affairs," says Stephen Mindich, the publisher.

Mr. Mindich prefers that the paper, with a circulation of about 50,000 since its merger with the Phoenix and now called the Boston Phoenix, not be categorized as underground. "I think too many of those papers have been irresponsibly anti-establishment. I'd rather this paper be called an alternative urban weekly."

Atlanta's Great Speckled Bird has a circulation of more than 12,000 and is one of the most popular weeklies, straight or underground, in the South.

Four years ago it was disparagingly denounced as "that hippie paper" by Atlanta citizens. But today it has considerable influence and features local community coverage along with its own brand of radical politics. A recent issue included articles on housing shortages for blacks and rate hikes by the Georgia Power Company.

Underground papers have not only popularized everything in the counter-culture from drugs to dropping out, they have also aided the momentum of causes like ecology, women's liberation and peace.

Activists credit the Ann Arbor Sun for helping elect two radicals to the City Council and for lower fines for

marijuana smokers. Boston After Dark and the Phoenix claim their investigative stories were instrumental in halting construction of the Park Plaza urban renewal project that many felt threatened the community.

NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE
15 FEBRUARY 1976

Soc401.1 Real
Paper
L Boston
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Up from underground

With their hefty circulation and lucrative advertising,
Boston's weekly 'alternative' papers
are not yet Establishment—but they are certainly establish

Soc401.1 Los Angeles
Free Press

L Berkeley Barb

L The Sun

L Figaro

L The Drummer

Orig under Real Paper

